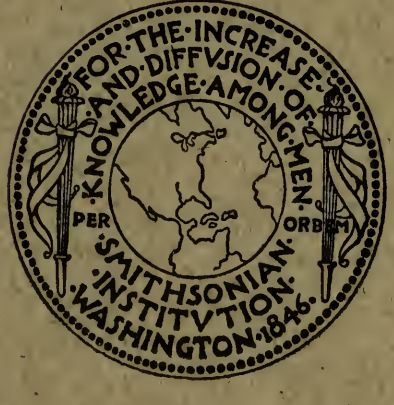
NOTES ON THE DANCES, MUSIC, AND SONGS OF THE ANCIENT AND MODERN MEXICANS

BY

AUGUSTE GENIN

FROM THE SMITHSONIAN REPORT FOR 1920, PAGES 657–678
(WITH 10 PLATES)



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NOTES ON THE DANCES, MUSIC, AND SONGS OF THE ANCIENT AND MODERN MEXICANS.[1]

By Auguste Genin.

[With 10 plates.]

INTRODUCTION.

All authors who have written on ancient Mexico are agreed in telling us that music, song, and dance were in vogue among the earliest inhabitants of that which was later New Spain, and that not only did they have a kind of conservatory to perpetuate traditions, but also families of a certain standing engaged singing and dancing masters to educate their children.

Among the modern Mexicans the situation is the same. There is a conservatory at Mexico City; the European masters are known and appreciated by the public; people dance a little everywhere as they dance in Paris, London, and New York; and the cakewalk, the maxixe, the (chaloupee) waltz, and other rhythmical contortions are practiced in the Mexican salons, with the same enthusiasm as in other countries, which proves that there are but few eccentricities which fashion does not cause to spread. But in these notes I do not wish to take up the modern dances, songs, or music, which, as stated in the preceding sentence, are the same everywhere; but only that which presents an ethnic character, traditional or peculiar to Mexico.

Before reviewing the present situation among the Mexicans, it is not without interest to cast a glance into the past. As is well known, ancient Mexico was inhabited by several races, although certain ones among them, as the Toltecs, the Aztecs, and the Mayas are especially well known. If we look at the catalogue of Mexican languages, so carefully prepared by Orozco y Berra, we shall see that at the epoch of the conquest, more than 60 dialects, belonging to as many tribes, divided the country which extended from the Mississippi to the Isthmus of Panama. All these tribes did not belong to different races; many had a common head, and they can be divided into a dozen large

[1] Translated by permission from the Revue d'Ethnographie et de sociologie, 1913. Ernest Leroux, editeur, Paris.

groups: the various Nahoas tribes, which occupied the central plateau of Mexico; the Otomis who lived and still live in the mountains surrounding the valley of Mexico; the Tarascs of Michoacan; the Tzapotecs, the Mixtecs, and the Mijes, inhabiting more particularly the present States of Oaxaca and of Vera Cruz; the Lacandons, who still live in the almost impenetrable forest of Chiapas; the Mayas, whose domain is Yucatan; the Hauxtecs, dwelling on the shores of the Gulf of Mexico, including a part of the States of Vera Cruz, Tamaulipas, and San Luis Potosi; the Redskins of Chihuahua and of Sonora, probably descendants of the ancient Chichimecs; and finally Huicholes and the Tapahumares, who inhabit the Sierras parallel to the Pacific Ocean, in the former Territory of Tepic, to-day the State of Nayarit.

The purpose of that which precedes is to show that it is not necessary to believe that the usages and customs of one or another of these ethnic clans or tribes had a general character.

For example, the Mayas, eminently civilized, devoted themselves to religious practices, full of ritual and reverential fear, which were unknown to the Redskins and the Indians of the Pacific Sierras, who were developing from the pre-Cortezian civilization, for they shut themselves off almost entirely from modern influence.

The Aztecs who dominated over the Anahuac—that is, the valley of Mexico, and who fought their way to the borders of the present Mexico—had different customs from the people whom they overcame, and these they imposed upon them, with their gods and their religious practices, respecting, nevertheless, the local gods, in such a manner that while increasing the range of their own myths they augmented the number of them by adopting the gods of the conquered countries as a whole or in part, perhaps through fear of these gods or, more probably, for political reasons, in order to draw the sympathy of the conquered.

In view of what precedes, we will describe in the course of these notes certain special dances in certain regions of Mexico, without in any way implying that they were in use anywhere else, although in the course of events they often passed from one tribe into another for various reasons.

ANCIENT MUSIC AND DANCES.

Torquemada, who gives special attention to the Aztecs, tells us that the Mexicans were not musicians, that their songs were very monotonous, although they varied the tone of them without abandoning certain very marked rhythms. The musical instruments which they used were rudimentary. I will give a description of them later on. As for the dances, or balls, they varied greatly. Orozco y Berra, in commenting on Torquemada, describes them thus:

"At private affairs the dancers were few in number. They increased according to circumstances and numbered thousands on occasions of formal fêtes. When they were in small numbers they arranged themselves in rows which advanced and moved back with measured steps, or placed themselves opposite each other, joining and mingling. If the dancers were in large numbers, the musicians, seated or standing on small mats, occupied the center of the place where the ball was held, while all around them the dancers moved in concentric circles and eddied about with more or less rapidity according to whether they were more or less distant from the musicians. The leaders of the ball, two or four in number, were all near the musicians, the other dancers being in a formation like the radii of a circle." (It was probably the style of the master of ceremonies or of the ballet which regulated the step or the measure.)

"At a signal, the music commenced, and the art consisted in dancing, so as to make the rhythmic movements coincide with the music and the songs which accompanied it." (Knowing that the Mexican instruments produced a rather discordant music, it may be supposed that the songs were for the purpose of giving it some harmony by blending the deep sounds of the drums with the shrill notes of the flutes and pipes.)

"The movements were carefully indicated and the dancers," says Orozco y Berra, "as though moved by springs, were supposed to raise simultaneously the same hand, the same arm, or move the same foot. Naturally," he adds, "those in the first circle moved relatively slowly, but in proportion as they were distant from the center, the dancers had to cover a greater distance in the same length of time, and consequently the speed kept increasing. At the end of each strophe, they started over again. Then the time changed, constantly increasing the rapidity of movement, in such a manner that at the end the dancers in the last circles acquired a giddy speed. Between the concentric circles the little children followed the dance, together with buffoons and a kind of clowns, who wore ridiculous disguises, and now and then spoke or sang jokes or clever remarks to amuse the spectators."

These chorographic spectacles lasted for several hours. The tired dancers were replaced by others and the first withdrew to refresh themselves or take some rest. All came dressed in their most beautiful clothing, and covered with ornaments and jewels, carrying in their hands bouquets of flowers, branches, or fans made of bright-colored plumes. Others were crowned with garlands, "and it was a spectacle worthy of admiration," declares Torquemada.[2]

[2] Monarquia Indiana, vol. 14, Chap. XI.

In an excellent work, Indumentaria Mexicana,[3] the eminent Americanist, Dr. Antonio Peñafiel, gives some very interesting details on the balls of the ancient Mexicans. The following passages are quoted from it:

"The ball was almost always accompanied by songs, two singers intoning a verse and all responding in chorus. The music began on a deep note, and the singers in a bass voice. Progressively they increased the time or raised the voice at the same time that the movement of the dancers became quicker and the song gayer * * *.

"One of the balls, called the *Macehualiztli* or *Areito* 'ball' or 'fashion,' was accompanied by drums. *Macehualiztli* is derived from the Aztec verb *maceahua*, a dancer, and *areito* is a word from the Antilles having the same meaning. It is synonymous with *Mitote*, which is derived from the Mexican *Mitotiani*, a dancer."

"According to Sahagun," says Doctor Peñafiel, "those who directed the ball were luxuriously dressed. The principal leader wore bound around the top of his head a tuft of feathers or of gold, an ornament of gold or a precious stone in the lower lip (le tentetl), and golden ornaments in the ear. A collar of precious stones encircled his neck, and at his wrists shone bracelets of emeralds and turquoises. He held in his hands bunches of feathers or flowers, a rich cloak covered his shoulders, and around his loins he wore the *maxtlatl* (a cotton loin cloth worn by the Mexicans). All the other dancers, gentlemen, warriors, and various people who were supposed to take part in the festival, were dressed in the same manner, although less luxuriously.

"The distinctive mark of the kings at the balls was a kind of banner (the *quetzalpatzactli*) which constituted also a war standard.[4]

"The *tlamanime*, warriors who had captured enemy prisoners, wore during the balls a frontal ornament called *tottotlamanalli*. This ornament consists of the head of a bird surrounded by a crown of eagle feathers.

"Besides the religious and the war dances, there was one which they called *cuicoyan*, meaning, according to Tezozomoc, 'the great delight of ladies. The word comes from *cuicuatl*, song, and the ball took place in a sort of convent, which they called the *cihuacalli*, 'house of women.' The drinks which they used to intoxicate themselves during these balls contained several venomous, active principles, which caused visions, luminous, fantastic, and sometimes also veritable delirium. Such were the *Itzcuiatl* and the *Piastecomatl*,

[3] Mexico, 1903.

[4] The *quetzalpatzactli* was a sort of shield bearing the hieroglyphics of the chief whose duty it was to carry it in battle, and surmounted with a tuft of green and blue feathers of the quetzal bird.

which they drank during the ball of the dead, and also another beverage which had for a base a fungus named *cuauhnanacatl*, of which they made use during certain religious ceremonies."

On the subject of the Mexican balls, Father Acosta tells us the following (it is translated almost word for word respecting the unaffected simplicity of the text):

"The recreative exercise the most in use among the Mexicans is the solemn *mitote*, which is a kind of ball, considered so noble and so honorable that the king himself deigned at times to take part. This ball took place generally in the spacious halls of temples or of the royal residences. They placed in the center of the hall the *teponaztli* and a drum (the *huehuetl*), like a barrel made of a single piece of wood and hollow inside, which they put upon a support bearing the figure of a man or of an animal, or simply on a column. These two instruments were so tuned that together they gave quite good harmony, and they accompanied the noise of the other instruments and of the many and diversified kinds of chants and songs. All sang and danced to the sound and in the cadence of these instruments, with such good order and such good time, both in the songs and the foot movements, that it was an agreeable thing to watch. They formed two circles or rows, one of which was around the center of the hall near the instruments. The old people and the lords—constituting one circle—sang and danced almost without moving from their places. The other circle was for the rest of the crowd and was quite distant from the first. The dancers forming it moved lightly two by two, executing a kind of step together with leaps in cadence. The crowd adorned themselves for these dances with their finest clothes, each according to his means and his taste. They considered it very honorable to take part in these dances, and there they prepared themselves to learn dancing from childhood on. And, although the majority of the dances were in honor of the gods, nevertheless there were those which constituted a form of recreation and pastime for the people."

Regarding the true war dances, not only did the warriors take part in them, but also the greatest personages of the court and the king himself, for whom a special place was reserved. For sacred dances the dancers were dressed in the image of the deities whom they worshiped on that day, or wore exclusively his emblems and his symbols. The music was the same—that is, it was not very harmonious, but the songs, the movements, and the actions had a more reserved, more solemn character, and mingling was not permitted. The men danced alone with the exception of certain days in the year when the vestals were admitted, as were also the students from the seminaries and even the priests, and it was no longer

a matter merely of reverence, of respect; arms were raised in cadence toward the sky to thank the gods; actions made allusion to their qualities, or to the occupation over which they preside, fighting, hunting, as we shall describe later on. Many of the dancers carried in their hands a kind of rattle which the modern Mexicans call *sonajas* and which the ancient Mexicans named *ayacaxtli*. These are sometimes little elongated gourds, dried in the sun, having the seeds left inside, which produced when shaken a noise resembling the singing of locusts. Sometimes balls of baked clay or of wood were used, pierced with numerous small holes, provided with a handle for shaking them, and containing pebbles to take the place of the seeds in the gourds. Generally the dancers marched in two or four lines from the entrance of the temple to near the altar of the gods, retreating without turning around, then advancing again.

Let us note in passing that they never kneeled. This custom appears to be absolutely unknown to the ancient Mexicans. To prostrate themselves or to humble themselves they assumed a squatting posture (*de cuclillas*, writes Torquemada). That was their reverential position, both in worshiping the gods and in paying homage to priests, to kings, and to great noblemen.

One of these dances, called *tocotin*, was so beautiful, so fitting, and so solemn, says Torquemada, that it was admitted into the Christian temples.

The dances in honor of the gods and in costumes recalling their special character or their symbols, bring to mind the balls held in honor of the ox Apis—ancestor of our Boeuf Gras—notably at Memphis, by the disguised actors who represented scenes from the life of Osiris. Father Salvatierra writes that he has counted among the ancient Mexicans as many as 30 different dances; some were sacred, others war dances, and yet others simply profane, and that each "had for its aim the imitating of occupations or customs of life." He mentions in particular a ball which he witnessed in California, in the course of which each dancer—and there were more than 300 of them—leaped about having in his mouth an adder.

As regards war dances, besides the festivals accompanied by balls held on certain days of the year in honor of *Huitzilipochtli*, there should be mentioned the dance of victory, which varied according to the greater or less degree of civilization of the peoples or tribes who practiced it. As for the dances which we will call civil or profane, Father Salvatierra adds that in leaping about "the dancers imitated the operations and the efforts of hunting, of fishing, of war, of the harvesting of roots and of fruits, and of other ordinary occupations. One of these dances is called the Nimbus." It should be noted that this name has nothing to do with the sense that we attach to the vocable "nimbus," which could very well be applied to the kind of

dance of Loie Fuller, which, in fact, takes place in a nimbus of colors and of gauze.

I consider that Father Salvatierra is in error when he speaks of "the imitation of ordinary occupations by the dancers." It seems to me, after what I have seen in the writings of Torquemada, Sahagun, Mendieta, Ixtlixochitl, and other early authors, that these balls were appropriate to circumstances: For example, on the day of the festival of the goddess of the chase, *Micoatl*, they imitated activities of the hunt; those of fishing when they fêted *Apochtli*. When it came to *Centeotl*, the Mexican Ceres, they simulated in pantomime the gathering of fruits and roots, they organized a battle of flowers, they adorned themselves with garlands; in the same way that in fêting *Huitzilipochtli*, the god of war, they gave representations of combats.

In short, they dedicated to the god the occupation over which he presided through his special character. As in our calendar, each day of the year had its god, its goddess, its myth, its distinctive emblem. They celebrated these anniversaries: A child born, for example, on the day of the festival of *Apochtli*, god of the fishers; a woman who was married on that day; any event which happened on that date, justified the presentation or the representation of something recalling the fête of the day. No doubt they offered up fish, and in the dances which took place in the course of the jubilation they did not fail to introduce people dressed as fishers; they adorned the hall with nets, harpoons, small boats, aquatic flowers and plants; in short, everything which belonged to the domain of the god, patron of the day, or which recalled his functions, attributes, or character. This seems to me very probable, but I confess that I am not able to determine it definitely from the texts of ancient authors. It is simply a deduction.

The dances in honor of the god of war, which they would have held in cases like those which I have just mentioned, are not connected in any way with the famous dance of victory, to which I now come.

This ball was celebrated, as its name indicates, after a victory won over their enemies. The conquerors forced the vanquished to dance to exhaustion; that is, they killed them through dancing. They themselves mixed from time to time with the captives, uttering loud cries in honor of their god of war—who was not the same throughout Mexico—and gave themselves up to the excesses devised by the soldiers of all times and of all peoples after a triumph.

It is to be noted, however, that they did not become intoxicated, at least in the ordinary sense, for although the ancient Mexicans knew several alcoholic drinks, among others (besides those which we have already mentioned) the fermented sap of the agave (now known as pulque, formerly as *octli*); a brandy also extracted from the agave;

a kind of beer, which is still used among the Indians of the *sierra* of Tepic, and other fermented drinks made of maize, figs of Barbary (*tuna*), or flowers of the elder tree; drunkenness was prosecuted and punished among them in a very severe manner, except in exceptional cases, as evidently that of a victory won over their enemies. But still it must not be thought that drunkenness was general and exposed the conquerors to the danger of being the victims of a successful return of the conquered. That is, all the men did not indulge in drinking. Chosen men kept their senses and guarded the approaches to the camp or to the city where they celebrated the victory.

I have said above that the dance of victory varied according to the degree of civilization of the tribes which practiced it. The word civilization does not really express my thought, for civilization is entirely conventional. I should have said, "according to the more or less sanguinary character of the tribes."

In fact, the Opates who lived in the Sonora celebrated their victories by the ball of the scalps—that is, that in dancing they bore in their hands the scalps torn from the enemies killed by them. They also made the prisoners dance without allowing them to rest, but they included among them the children, the old people, and the women, and during the figures they burned them cruelly with torches and firebrands.

Other tribes more savage still—the fact is reported by the eminent Mexicanist Alfredo Chavero [5]—cut off the hands of their enemies and used them to stir the *pinole* [6] which they distributed to the conquerors. The human blood was mixed with the drink, but the dancers delighted in it, "the sentiment of vengeance," says Chavero, "effacing the sensation of disgust."

In speaking of the dance of victory the missionaries and the commentators exaggerate the cruelty of the Mexicans, their barbarous traits, which, however, have some foundation of fact. But if we recall the revolutionary dances, to the accents of "Ça ira," around the unfortunate victims of Robespierre, of Marat, and of Couthon, without taking account of still more recent events during certain strikes in France and elsewhere, without mentioning the lynchings of Negroes in the United States, we shall see that several centuries after the conquest of Mexico, there are found in the most civilized countries people who can at times rival in cruelty the barbarous tribes.

When in the seventeenth century several cities of New Mexico were reconstructed, the first thing that the natives would do would be to

[5] Mexico a través de los Siglos, Vol. I, p. 125.

[6] The *pinole* is a kind of chocolate. It is known that we owe to the ancient Mexicans the invention of this foodstuff. To make the *pinole* they mixed coffee meal with sugar of agave, and added to it either cocoa or pimento. In our day cinnamon is also added to it.

build up the hearth and to dance around it the ball of the " Cachina," for which they would make expressly masks many of which represented the faces of their ancient gods. It is still Chavero who makes this statement.[7] After all, it was a general custom in all ancient Mexico to dance around a sacred fire, around the central hearth of a newly constructed house, or of a habitation which they had just rebuilt, and for this ball the natives wore masks, or simply painted their faces to imitate tatooing, and adorned themselves with flowers, leaves, and plumage, with which they then paid homage to the household gods.

In Yucatan, one special dance was in favor, and later it spread, with some modifications, into different parts of Mexico, then remaining under another form. In the center of a room they raised a pole from 15 to 20 feet high which bore at the top transverse bars, fastened on a common center which formed a pivot. From the ends of the crossbars hung cords of different colors much longer than the distance between the bar and the ground. The dancers, from 12 to 20 in number, each took the end of a cord, and at a signal commenced to move in cadence, advancing, retreating, turning, and crossing their respective cords in such a way as to form a kind of web, presenting symmetrical designs determined beforehand.

When, on account of this interweaving, the cords were so shortened that the dancers could scarcely hold them, even by stretching their arms and by standing on their toes, a new signal was given by the music, and the dancers, always in time and according to a prescribed rhythm, unwove the design which they had plaited, finding themselves at the end in the places which they had occupied in the beginning.

This kind of dance admitted of a variation: The cords were not so long, the dancers of both sexes were disguised as birds, and they were supposed to run, to pursue each other, to dance, to leap, even to imitate the flight of birds by moving the wings which they wore fastened to their shoulders; all without losing the cadence. This play, minus the costumes, however, is still preserved in Mexico, where it is called *volador*. It is, as will have been noticed, an exercise quite like that known in Europe under the name of Pas de Géants.

One of the most curious of the balls which may be mentioned was that of the animals and flowers: Men and women dressed like birds (Rostand has found nothing new in this connection) danced and whistled while turning in time, leaping up onto the trees, throwing themselves into the water when they simulated aquatic birds, throw-

[7] Mexico a través de los Siglos, Vol. I, p. 116.

ing themselves on the grass; trying in every way to imitate the inhabitants of the air whose plumage they wore or which they pretended to represent.

For the dance of the flowers, the dancers dressed themselves in different leaves and flowers; for the ball of the animals, they covered themselves with skins of stags, pumas, ocelots, bears, of all the animals known to them; they ran, leaped, uttered cries, and pursued the women disguised as hinds and followed by their offspring.

It is certain that these kinds of dances should lend much to the imagination, and without pretending that they could rival the ballets of the opera, nevertheless in the open air under the beautiful Mexican skies, with the setting of palm trees, liquid ambers, the hibiscus and convolvulus of the Tropics, the magnolias, passion flowers, mimosas, and orchids of the temperate regions; cedars, oleanders, and cactuses of the cool regions; it must have produced a marvelous effect, especially if we remember the precious stones, the pearls, the gold and silver ornaments with which the dancers adorned themselves, the many-colored flowers with which their garments were studded, and especially the enormous glowworms and the luminous beetles with which the women adorned their hair.[8]

It will be noted that, except the *Cuicoyan*, none of the dances of which we have spoken have the licentious character of similar ceremonies in ancient Egypt, in Greece, in Rome, and in India. At heart the ancient Mexicans were chaste, and this is seen as well in the subject we are discussing as in their monuments, their sculpture, their hieroglyphic paintings which time has respected, and in which are met very rarely phallic symbols and other obscene images.

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS.

We have mentioned above the *ayacaxtli*, in Spanish *sonajas*, a kind of bell with a handle, which the Mexicans shook while dancing. The other musical instruments were:

The *huehuetl*, a cylindrical drum 2 feet in diameter and 5 or 6 feet high, quite like the elongated drums of the Middle Ages. Generally it was made of a single piece, hollowed out with great care. They placed it vertically and beat it on the upper part with a wooden stick bearing at the end a ball of wood, of rubber, or of clay in a leather sheath.[9]

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[8] Some of these beetles, as the "cocuyos" of the Tropics, are sufficiently brilliant and cast enough light around them so that, when held under a glass, they enable one on a dark night to easily read a newspaper.

[9] I say that the *huehuetl* were beaten with mallets, and I differ in this from the opinion of my excellent teacher and friend, Eugene Boban, who in his Documents pour servir a l'Histoire du Mexique, Vol. II, p. 132, tells us that the *huehuetl* of the temples or *teocalli* were only beaten with the back of the hand and never with drumsticks.

There were smaller instruments which the warriers wore suspended about their necks, and which they used to transmit the orders of the chiefs by means of adequate rolls. They called them *tlapahuehuetl.*[10]

The *teponaztli* was also a drum, but horizontal, and which they beat not on the end but at the center, on two strips made for that purpose forming an H in the direction of the length. They beat on these strips with mallets like those mentioned above, but smaller. The tone was more or less deep according to the location of the strip which the musician struck, sometimes with one hand, sometimes using both, the same as for the *huehuetl.* These instruments were carefully sculptured or embellished with designs. Some affected the form of a crouching animal: puma, ocelot, or alligator.

There were still other *teponaztli,* which quite resembled kettle-drums, and which were formed of the hollowed-out trunk of an agave, over which a skin was tightly stretched; for example, the celebrated *teponaztli* of the Great Temple of Mexico, which was made of a hollow piece of wood covered with a snake skin. The sound of it was mournful and carried a great distance. It signalized generally great ceremonies, and there will be recalled the mention made of it by Cortez and Bernal Diaz del Castillo, as also the "Conquistador Anonimo," who heard its terrible call at the time of the revolution of Tenochtitlan, on the night of the 30th of June or the 1st of July, 1520 (La noche triste).[11]

I have also seen *teponaztli* made of a tortoise shell covered with the skin of a sea cow, whose tone resembled quite closely that of our modern drums. These were called *ayotl.* It is worth while adding

[10] The etymology of *tlapahuehuetl* is not easy to determine, at least opinions are very different:

To begin with, *huehuetl* means incontestably "tree hollowed by time," or, by analogy, "piece of wood hollowed out." This caused no difficulty, and, in fact, the instrument is a piece of wood hollowed out.

But what does *tlapa* signify? In all the geographical names in which this radical is found, the hieroglyphic shows a lavatory, a place where one washes, a wash cloth, a hand playing in the water. (See the remarkable Nomenclatura de Nombres geograficos de Mexico, by Dr. Antonio Peñafiel, Mexico, 1895.) But this translation applied to a drum to me has no meaning.

On the other hand, in Mexico they designate by the name *tlapalerias* all places where they sell paints and varnishes; evidently this name is derived from the Aztec *tlapalli,* color, *tlapani,* to dye. It can then be admitted that the *tlapahuehuetl,* differing from other drums of this kind, was painted, adorned in colors, which would be easily explained, since indeed it was a drum reserved for warriors, and there would be nothing extraordinary in their carrying certain colors, or rather certain signs, certain hieroglyphics belonging to one certain tribe or army corps. Besides, there have been found *tlapahuehuetl* which still show fragments of red and black lacquered painting.

But I go further. I believe that *tlapahuehuetl* means not only "drum with colors" or "painted drum," but, by extension, "signal drum"; and if it is admitted that this drum was carried particularly by the aide-de-camp, who, by beating it in a certain way, transmitted the orders of the leaders, my explanation will seem admissible: *Tlaphuehuetl* means, then, signal drum, order drum, or drum of command, as you wish.

Several authors write, not *tlapahuehuetl,* but *tlapanhuehuetl. Tlapan* in Aztec means place where they dye, dye works; *tlapani,* to dye. *Tlapanhuehuetl,* then, still signifies "dyed or painted drum."

[11] The tragic night.

that whenever these instruments were covered with any skin whatever, they were provided with straps to stretch them and tune them. The pitch for all kinds comprised only three notes, do, re, and si.

The *teponaztli* in general were placed on tripods, not only to bring them more easily within reach of the standing musicians, but especially to avoid contact with the earth, which would deaden the sound and prevent it from carrying so far.

Besides these various kinds of drum, the ancient Mexicans used whistles, many of which had at the mouthpiece three or even four holes, permitting them to give as many different notes. These whistles were generally of earthenware and affected different forms. Many of them represented flowers, birds, and sometimes even fish and snakes. Some had inside a small round stone or ball of clay, which produced a rolling when they were blown. A special whistle permitted of the imitation of the song of a bird, which, it is true, should not be compared with the Mexican nightingale, the *zentzontli* (bird-mocker, or more exactly, the bird of the four hundred voices). This whistle was called *quauhtotopotli.*

The ancient Mexicans had also flutes or rather a sort of fife, with three, four, and even five holes, sometimes made of terra cotta, sometimes of wood, and quite often of bone. Some have been found made from a humerus. The Museum of Mexico has one of this last kind, which has six holes. This kind of instrument is at present known by the name of *chirimia.*

They had also war trumpets, *tepuzquiquiztli.* These consisted of large shells, one end of which had been cut off to form the mouthpiece. These were also made of terra cotta, imitating the shape of a shell and ending with the head of a tiger or a snake.

There should be mentioned, besides, the bells of all kinds of metal; copper, gold, and silver, more or less mixed, and bearing designs in relief, like those which are sometimes found in our time in Chiapas and Yucatan, and which vary in dimensions from the size of a plum to that of a cherry. They made them also of wood. I have collected many of them among the ruins of "La Quemada" (State of Zacatecas); others, finally, were of terra cotta. They used these bells somewhat as the Spaniards use castanets.

All these instruments still exist among the modern Mexicans, and the Indians use them in their characteristic dances. But other materials are introduced into their manufacture. For example, they have whistles, flutes, and bells not only of terra cotta and of wood but even of tin.

They have also increased the number of them by perfecting the flute of Pan, and adding little trumpets of terra cotta, which recall our pistons; and little bells also of terra cotta affecting the form of the

bust of a woman surmounting an enormous crinoline, quite like the table bells that we have in Europe and in the United States. I have several specimens of them which produce a silvery tone, not at all dead as one would suppose. This evidently results from the composition of the special clay which the makers used. Sometimes these little bells were doubled, that is, coupled together, giving two quite different tones.

In the balls of the Indians of our time there are frequently introduced entirely modern orchestras with wind and stringed instruments, but in that case the ball was not slow in degenerating, although keeping its ancient character in movements and rhythms, as we shall see later on, in the ball of the Antiguos, the Matachines, or buffoons; the polka, the danza, and the boleros made their entrance; the couples were mixed, and it resembled any popular ball, with the usual accompaniment of cries, libations, disputes, and knife cuts.

MODERN DANCES.

Fray Bernardino de Sahagun [12] and Father Acosta [13] mention the theatrical representations and the balls which the ancient Mexicans gave at Cholula in honor of *Quetzalcoatl.* "The Aztecs," they say, "cultivated not only lyric poetry but also the dramatic. Their theater was a platform, square and uncovered, situated ordinarily in the center of the market place or at the foot of some pavilion. This platform was sufficiently raised to enable it to be seen from all sides by the spectators."

"The theater of Tlaltelolco," writes Cortez in his Relaciones, "was made of stones and lime, 30 feet high and 30 paces on a side."

They carefully adorned this kind of stage with branches, plants, and flowers. Stuffed birds were placed in the foliage. The actors, ludicrously painted, simulated being deaf, blind, or afflicted with some infirmity, which gave rise to much blundering and jeering. They went to ask of some idol the cure for their ills, and thanked them for hearkening to their prayer.

Other actors disguised as animals of every kind recounted stories, expressing in pantomime scenes in which the vices and faults of men were ridiculed by the animals, serving as lessons of high morality like the admirable fables of our La Fontaine. They gave also representations of historic facts, of battles, and the actors put so much feeling into them that often a man was killed. The representation always finished with a ball, in which the different actors took part in the costume of the rôles which they had filled, and this did not take place without leading to comic scenes.

[12] Historia general de las cosas de Nueva Espana.
[13] Historia natural y moral de las Indias.

When the Spanish missionaries began to catechize the ancient Mexicans they took advantage of their taste for singing and for the theater, and organized representations closely resembling the Mystères des Enfants Sans Souci and the Confrères de la Passion, which were executed in our churches in the Middle Ages. These mysteries were accompanied by sacred songs which made easier the teaching of the Christian doctrine.

It is thus Sahagun composed in the Aztec tongue 365 "canticos," one for each day of the year. It would be more correct to say not "canticles" but farces, for the songs, although of a religious character, were often accompanied by gestures and intermingled with dialogues. He had numerous imitators among the Mexicans themselves, and the memory has not been lost of a great mystery in honor of the Mother of God, due to Don Francisco Placido, governor of Atzcapotzalco. This mystery was successfully represented in one of the celebrated ceremonies in the basilica of Notre Dame de Guadaloupe.

There should not be forgotten either the Final Judgment of Father Andres de Olmos, represented in the church of Tlaltelolco, in the presence of the first viceroy, Don Antonio de Mendoza, and of Fray Zumarraga, the first archbishop of Mexico (1540).

These festivals have still another origin besides that which has just been mentioned. In the time immediately following the Spanish conquest, the conquerors and the monks held dances for their Indian vassals—for the abbeys had vassals, like the seignorial fiefs given to the conquistadors by the kings of Spain—dances recalling more or less exactly those of the ancient Mexicans.

For the rest, there were religious festivals, and even profane ones—I will speak of them later on—in which the Indians, remembering their conversion to Christianity, came to make honorable amends in some church. To do this, they dressed up in imitation of their ancestors, danced and sang in accordance with what they had retained or knew of the past; and all was accompanied by alms for the priests who perceived in this the most indisputable gain for the natives. Later still, when the Indians saw the Spaniards celebrating the carnival, this old custom came to life, and what was formerly a kind of affirmation, of acknowledgment of vasselage, then a religious festival, became only a vague mardi gras or a day of mi-careme.

These representations, in use until the last day of the Spanish domination, disappeared at the beginning of the nineteenth century, during the political disorders. During the 10 years of the War of Emancipation of New Spain the Indians, like the middle class of people, had other preoccupations than the theater and dances. The Spanish clergy had lost all influence, and the native clergy was only beginning to be organized.

In all that we say in the following we refer, of course, only to the Indians properly so called and to the lower classes. We will concern ourselves only with these two classes of Mexican society, because they are the only ones who have kept anything characteristic; the higher classes, as we have already said, model themselves as much as possible on the uses and customs of France and Spain and follow the modes of Paris, of London, and of New York with more or less delay.

After the proclamation of independence, as during the wars to gain it, the Indians and the common people continued to go to their services, but certain ceremonies were lost, among them the dances, whether in the church, in the court, or in the neighboring square. Nevertheless, in many Indian villages on certain dates, in particular for St. John, and for the invention or exaltation of the holy cross, the natives organized balls which they called "Bailes de los Antiguos" (dances of the ancestors).

They disguised themselves with all sorts of tinsel and ornaments, to resemble more or less vaguely the Mexicans of other times, even to the Redskins, whom some have still been able to see in the exercise of their functions; and thus accoutered, they sang, danced, and drank all one day and most of the night. The half-breeds willingly mix with them in this kind of celebration, which has, however, almost no ethnic character—nor esthetic. One of the figures, however, recalls vaguely the song and dance to the sun, of the Comanches and the Apaches. This ceremony generally took place around a victim, white prisoner or Indian warrior of another tribe, after some combat. The Redskins danced in the same manner around the stake where they burned the body of their chief. My friend, the worthy archeologist, M. Eugene Boban, who has told me the story of it, was present about 40 years ago at one of these weird ceremonies in the Sierra Madre of Chihuahua.

The savages, first taking each others hands, danced in a circle for a certain length of time, their eyes fixed on the stake; then separating, they continued to circle in the same order, uttering prolonged exclamations, while striking themselves on the chest with their hands, which produced a series of Ah! Ah! Ah! stopping only to breathe. At present, victim and stake are replaced by some barrels of "pulque" or by a jar of brandy and the howlings which the dancers utter are far from harmonious.

The Indians in general are sad—they do not know how to laugh. They sing but little, and when they do the melodies have little expression or are melancholy and without much charm. However, according to Miss Fletcher, collaborator of the Bureau of American Ethnology, their voices are remarkably accurate. She claims that she has had melodies sung by Indians of every age and of different

extractions, in solo and in chorus, and she has never found among the various performers the least alteration in rhythm or in melody. Miss Fletcher has collected with the aid of a phonograph different Indian melodies which she has transcribed with the usual notations and submitted for study to several expert musicians. Not only have they not been able to find the dissonance which might be expected in music coming from races uncultured and relatively little civilized, but they have even found in it, it is said, striking resemblances to "themes of Beethoven, of Schubert, of Schumann, and especially of Wagner." I confess that all of this astonishes me greatly, except that concerning Wagner; I have always wondered whether the music of this composer did not have something of barbarity, but it has been necessary for Miss Fletcher to open my ears in order that I might know to what to attribute my opinion.

As far as I am concerned, all the music I have heard among the Indians—that is, of course, original music and not imitations or recollections of things more or less modern—recalled nothing of Beethoven nor of Schumann, but rather brought to mind liturgical chants roared by drunken singers which could be heard a long way off. I will add, to justify my comparison, that generally when the Indians sing, except in church during services, they are drunk.

Several months ago I was able to be present at Dinamita [14] at the balls, semiprofane, semireligious, of the ancients or ancestors celebrated by the natives. These are divided into two groups—the Antiguos (ancients, ancestors) properly so called, disguised as Redskins at a carnival, and the Matachines (matachins, clowns), wearing fantastic costumes. It is to be noted that these dances—as droll as are the costumes—are very seriously conducted. The dancers do not dance for pleasure; they are observing a rite, a kind of religious ceremony. They dance to a monotonous rhythm which has more of the liturgical chant than of profane music.

They throw themselves about for hours and hours, day and night, almost without stopping, for about nine days, until completely exhausted. None of them dance in couples, no one touches anyone else; each dances on his own account, all following the general lines of a known program. No obscene motions; brief words to indicate the movements; and from time to time a great collective cry: Ah! Ah! Ah! Ah! which all modulate and prolong interminably. This recalls at times the "sun dance" of the Sioux and the Apaches, from whom the cry is certainly borrowed. We have already alluded to this above.

[14] Dinamita, where are located the acid and explosive factories of the Mexican National Dynamite and Industrial Explosives Co. (French capital), is situated in the State of Durango in a region called "La Tinaja" (the basin), which was formerly—and up to 50 years ago—a retreat of the Redskins, particularly the Apaches and Kickapoos. I have dug up numerous traces of them—bones, ornaments, and different implements.

Every day the festival and the ball are begun by a march toward the consecrated altars, one to the Holy Cross, the other to St. Joseph.[15] It must be noticed that among the dancers five or six personages are specially distinguished; the king; the queen, who is generally a little girl and the only person of her sex allowed to take part in the ball; the grand master of ceremonies, called simply the master, who seems to fill the rôle of an outsider to the company, a kind of master charged with calling to order and punishing, for very often he is furnished with a whip of several thongs, which he uses sometimes to mark the step, sometimes to beat time, and at other times to lash the dancers' legs. Besides him there frisked about the fool, who, dressed in a fool's cap, carried an empty bottle surmounted by a potato rudely carved to represent a human head, or perhaps more often a carved coconut provided with a handle or a little doll. The clown is for the purpose of amusing the public with his buffoonery, his jokes, his grimaces, his ridiculous antics, but he never makes his companions laugh. Sometimes the devil is also portrayed.

All these figures were well represented at Dinamita, but one was lacking which I have seen at other places—death! At Dinamita death was replaced by the old man, who after all symbolized the same thing, since old age is the beginning of the end, the preparation for the grave. The person who represents death or the old man often gives his hand to the fool, but pays no attention to his grimaces.

It is certain that all this constitutes an ensemble which formerly pointed a moral, as in all of the ancient mysteries. All men, rich or poor, kings or plebeians, are subjects of the empire of the senses; they make us all more or less foolish, more or less ridiculous; but always death lies in wait for us, and always we have a master:

> Over the humble are the powerful; over the powerful, the king;
> Over the king, the emperor; over the emperor, the fear
> Of a plot born among his escort;
> And over all the infinite, the future, God, death;
> Death, which for each, be he weak or strong,
> Suddenly opens the same door * * *

In the morning the dancers, led by the queen, move to the altar, dancing in two ranks, flanked by the fool, the devil, and the master, who to some extent play the part of clown. These are, I may repeat, the only persons whom one sees laughing at times. The others display only religious activity and ritualistic or hieratic poses and signs. After a series of dances and prayers before the rustic altar, other ensemble figures are danced outside, but always at determined intervals they return toward the altar.

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[15] Elsewhere than at Dinamita, the altar is consecrated most often to Notre Dame de Guadeloupe, the patron saint of Mexico, or to the saint, patron of the village in which the festival takes place.

One fact will give an idea of the distinctly religious character of these celebrations, in no way carnivalesque in spite of the costumes and the burlesque aspect of the whole at the first glance. On the 5th of May, 1912, the "ball" was at its height in Dinamita when, toward 4 o'clock in the afternoon, the priest asked me whether the time seemed to me suitable for the benediction of the graveyard, which was supposed to take place on that day. I agreed that it was, and with the priest, preceded by the sexton and followed by about 50 people, we took the road to the cemetery, about 3 kilometers away. While passing near the native village of Dinamita, where the dances took place, our passage was noted and immediately the dancers of the two troupes "Matachines" and "Antiguos" joined with us, together with their musicians, and followed, dancing and gesticulating as usual. The priest accepted their company, naturally and without the least notice, or, I should rather say, as something fitting, as a pious act. At the cemetery they made him sit on one of their two thrones; these consisted of rustic armchairs garlanded with ribbons, flowers, and leaves made of colored paper, and they bent devout knees during the benediction of the tombs and of the ground destined for future burials. They accompanied mutely the litanies, the rosary, then they returned with us without stopping their dancing and without their presence causing the least scandal.

This seems to me to demonstrate that these dances had a distinctly religious side. Traditionally, something of their freshness and of their early simplicity has undoubtedly been lost at obstacles on the journey traveled during four centuries. But they have nevertheless preserved a pagan element borrowed from the ancient myths of Mexico, together with the skillful grafting-on done by the Catholic missionaries. It is a mixture of the Cross of the Saviour of the World, the basis, bond, and symbol of the Christian religion, with the cross of Quetzalcoatl, which represents the four winds or the four cosmogonic suns of the Aztecs. But it is also, alas, the reflection of a considerable part of the population of Mexico, Indian or half-breed, semipagan, semi-Catholic, ignorant and fanatical among whom the thin veneer of civilization, the very superficial civil instruction and the religious education consisting almost entirely of affectations and outward practices of a cult, scarcely conceal the ferocity of the Redskin. Besides the war dances or the semi-religious, semiprofane dances of which I have just spoken and which have a character more or less archaic, there are several others, wholly modern, which are popular in Mexico: In the cool regions the *Jarabe*, the *Danson*, the *Boleros*, the *Jotas*, and in the tropical zone the *Zapateo*.

The *Jarabe* consists of a series of steps made by a man and woman, sometimes several couples, without touching each other, the man

dressed as a Mexican cavalier, the woman as a peasant of Puebla (*China Poblana*) or of Jalapa (*Jalapena*). The costume of the man is generally of deerskin adorned with silver buttons, or black trousers with a decoration of little pieces or figures of metal on the outer seam, a leather vest, white shirt, red cravat, a wide felt sombrero embroidered in gold and silver, and often spurs with rowels as large as saucers, weighing half a kilogram each. The woman wore a white waist adorned with lace and edging, showing her throat and the upper part of her breast, arms bare, a woolen skirt red at the top and green below, *rebozo* (scarf) of silk or cotton, according to the means of the dancer, silk stockings, little shoes, and in her hair, a wide tortoise-shell comb enriched with ornaments of gilded copper and artificial gems.

The orchestra is composed of the most diversified elements. We see in it the *chirimias* in imitation of the Aztecs, as well as drums which have no reason to envy the ancient *teponaztli* or the *huehuetl*, and all the stringed and wind instruments invented by human genius, with the exception of the biniou and the bagpipe, unknown to the Indians or the Creoles.

Of course, when they did not have such a complete orchestra, the dancers contented themselves with a simple flute or with a poor violin. But the spectators always accompanied the music by clapping their hands and singing more or less harmoniously.

As for the dancers they moved clumsily opposite one another, sometimes changing places, sometimes turning in their own places, body rigid and arms behind them.

Sometimes the cavalier throws his sombrero between him and his companion, and both gesticulate around it. After all, their dance is reduced to keeping the step in time.

The *boleros*, imitating the Spanish dance of that name, are danced especially at Oaxaca. They are charming when executed by the Spaniards, who have the rhythm of it in their blood, and who put into their play all the feeling, the lightness, and the grace of which they are capable; in Mexico, it is confined, as with the *Jarabe*, to marking the step, but this time with an accompaniment of castanets.

The *Jota* is another dance imported from Spain, accompanied by gestures and poses which are far from being in good taste, and seem to me more indecent than artistic.

The *danza* is a kind of polka, which is interrupted at fixed intervals during which two couples join hands and make a turn in time, then each man takes his partner again or the partner of the second man, and begins again.

The *Zapateo* is more interesting. It is truly a national dance, and consists of the following: Under a shed, they place a small movable floor, *la tarima*, around which the men group themselves; a guitar

player tunes his instrument, and soon there skip onto the boards four, six, or eight girls, wearing a flower in their hair. They dance together, striking their heels strongly and in time to the music on the boards of *la tarima*. One of the men begins a song, a kind of chant, or each improvises and sings his own verse, always to the same tune and with the drawling tone which is heard everywhere in warm climates. These verses do not demand great efforts of the imagination, as may be judged from the following lines. One of the singers says, for example:

Ma novia, in the midst of these girls,
Appears to me like a star, a flower, a jewel,
But how sad she is on this beautiful summer night.
Her heart is warm, her eyes are the sun.

And one of the bystanders responds:

My two horses are sick to-day,
But the tobacco produces fine crops;
My friend Jose drinks all of the brandy;
It is indeed not very kind of him.

And so together, the bystanders repeat the last verse, and another singer begins again. No need of rhyme nor of assonance; the time suffices and that is required to be only approximately exact. The bystanders applaud the best dancers and the most amusing singers; if anyone wishes to let one of the girls know that she pleases him while she dances, he takes off his hat and puts it on her head. Often a dancer thus balances a whole pyramid of sombreros to the great vexation of her less popular companions.

The *Zapateo* ended, she returns them to their respective owners and receives a piece of money or some trinket. Certain dancers dance the *Zapateo* in time to the music at the same time untying with the points of their shoes the knots in a scarf placed on the ground. The dance is called the *Rebozo*. The feat is difficult but if the dancer succeeds, she is enthusiastically applauded.

When the people from the coast (*Jarrochos*) joined with the Indian singers, their verses were full of obscenities and words of double meaning. In the warm region, however, they are very free with words, and without the women being in the least offended, enormities may be said before them.

I have tried to retrace as accurately as possible the ancient balls and the present dances of Mexico. I believe that it will be interesting to go more deeply into the subject; at first by reconstituting these ancient dances in Mexico itself, amidst characteristic landscapes, with the people of the country who have preserved the type of their ancestors. This applies to that which relates to the past. As for the modern dances, it may be said that there are about as many of them as there are provinces, not geographic, but climatic, in the

Mexican Republic. To give an exact idea of them, as well as to represent the reconstitutions of the ancient dances, it would be necessary not only to take numerous motion pictures, but also to be supplied with a phonographic apparatus, to record the songs and the musical rhythms. This evidently requires time and patience but it has been tried elsewhere.

My friend, Louis Ganne, the author of "Pere la Victoire" and of "La Tzarine," has done it or at least was planning to do it several years ago for certain of the French colonies. It would be extremely interesting for a country so rich from an ethnographical and archeological point of view as Mexico, and I hope that this study may encourage some one to try it.



1. MUSICIANS WITH DRUMS, CLACKERS, WHISTLES, BELLS, ETC.

All of these statuettes, remarkable for their ear ornaments (*yacacaztli*) and nose ornaments (*tepeyacaztli*), were collected by the author in the territory of Tepic, near Ixtlan.



2. ANCIENT MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS.

1. Terra-cotta whistles in the form of birds, with two or three holes giving as many tones.
2. Sea shell with the end cut off to produce various calls and different tones.
3. Flutes and flageolets.
4. A kind of ocarina in the shape of a turtle giving four notes.
5. Whistles in the form of idols.
6. Whistles with one, two, and three holes.
7. Various whistles.
8. Terra-cotta bells.
9. Whistles in the shape of animals' heads.
10. Bell or clacker with three small bells serving as feet.



1. DRUM PLAYER FROM THE SIERRA NAYARIT. NOTE THE EAR AND NOSE ORNAMENTS, AND THE TATTOOING ON THE CHEEKS AND CHEST.



2. ACTORS DRESSED AS AZTECS, WHO TOOK PART IN THE FESTIVAL OF FLOWERS AND THE HARVEST HELD SOME YEARS AGO AT XOCHIMILEO.





ACTORS DRESSED AS AZTECS, WHO TOOK PART IN THE FESTIVAL OF FLOWERS AND THE HARVEST HELD SOME YEARS AGO AT XOCHIMILEO.





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1. ACTORS DRESSED AS AZTECS, WHO TOOK PART IN THE FESTIVAL OF FLOWERS AND THE HARVEST HELD SOME YEARS AGO AT XOCHIMILEO.



2. MODERN MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS.

(Author's collection.)

1. Mandolin made from the shell of an armadillo.
2–4. Terra-cotta bells from Oaxaca, producing a very marked silvery tone.
5. Terra-cotta bells.
6. Gourd containing dry seeds for producing noise and for accompanying dances in the same manner as with castanets.
7. Terra-cotta flutes.
8. Terra-cotta bells.
9. Ocarina made by the natives of Oaxaca.
10. Terra-cotta trumpets.
11. Bells.
12. Bells and whistles of tin.
13. Whistles of various kinds.
14. Pasteboard whistle.
15. "Jarana," a kind of guitar.



DANCE OF THE ANTIGUOS; THE QUEEN AND THE OLD MAN IN THE CENTER.



DANCE OF THE ANTIGUOS; IN THE CENTER, THE QUEEN; ON THE LEFT, THE OLD MAN; ON THE RIGHT, THE FOOL.



THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE DANCE OF THE MATACHINES (BUFFOONS).



DANCE OF THE WARRIORS AROUND THE QUEEN.



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: THE LEADER (A MUSICIAN), THE QUEEN, THE FOOL, THE OLD MAN.



THE DEVIL (WEARING ON HIS HEAD REAL GOAT HORNS); THE SIMPLETON OR FOOL; AND THE WHIPPER, REDRESSER OF WRONGS.



THE OLD MAN. HE CARRIES A DOLL TO SHOW THAT HE HAS ENTERED HIS SECOND CHILDHOOD.



DANCE OF THE WARRIORS AROUND THE QUEEN.



THE JARABE IN 1868, AFTER AN ILLUSTRATION OF THAT PERIOD.



A PHASE OF THE DANCE OF THE SOMBRERO.

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